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LARSON FIGHTS FOR AMENDMENT TO FULLY FUND "IDEA" SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, D.C.- U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) will introduce an amendment tonight mandating that the federal government fully fund its share of the cost of the Individuals with Disabilities In Education (IDEA) Act. He will offer the amendment to H.R. 1350, a bill which will reauthorize the IDEA program. Larson will also submit testimony in support of the amendment to the House Rules Committee, which will then vote this evening on whether or not to allow Larson's measure to be taken up on the House floor alongside H.R. 1350. When IDEA was originally passed in 1975, Congress placed the federal share of the cost at 40 percent. It has never funded more than 17.6 percent.

"The federal government does not meet the financial obligations for special education it committed to in 1975 when IDEA was first passed by Congress," said Larson. "This shortfall places an onerous financial burden on local communities who are required by law to find alternate resources, such as higher property taxes, to fund special education. This amendment would put an end to the embarrassing legacy that the federal government has created for itself in failing to fully fund special education and saddling the states with tens of billions in unfunded mandates. On May 4, 1999, 413 Members of the House passed a resolution in which the House expressed the sense of Congress that IDEA is a high priority and that it should be fully funded, yet still no real action has been taken.

"At a time when our nation is at war, the President and the Republican majority continue to seek huge tax cuts that benefit the very wealthiest Americans, and prevent the federal government from fully funding IDEA or meeting other critical needs of Americans, including prescription drug relief for the elderly. War requires sacrifice, yet in order to make room for their tax cuts, the only Americans the Republican leadership has asked to sacrifice are seniors and students. Now is the time to address these needs and make the federal government live up to its commitment," said Larson.

Since 1975, Congress has authorized a federal commitment to special education funding at a level of 40 percent of the average per pupil expenditure (APPE) on special education services. However, Congress has only appropriated funds to meet between 5 and 16 percent of the APPE, with fiscal year 2002 appropriations setting a record at 17.6 percent, or about \$8.7 billion. This has resulted in great burdens being placed on school districts. For example, in the 2001-02 school year, the last completed school year, the town of Berlin, Connecticut spent \$4,721,372 on special education, with all but \$361,543 locally funded, far short of the 40 percent commitment.

The amendment is based on legislation that Larson has introduced in the previous two Congresses, H.R. 823, mandating that the federal government meet its 40 percent obligation immediately.

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